

**MINUTES OF THE LOCAL MEETING OF THE  
WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION  
June 23, 2004**

The local jurisdiction meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 8:30 a.m., on June 23, 2004, at Red Lion Hotel, Yakima Gateway, 9 North 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Yakima, Washington.

Commissioners present at the meeting were: Chair Aubrey Davis, Ed Barnes, Elmira Forner, A. Michèle Maher, Dan O'Neal and Dale Stedman.

**YAKAMA NATION WELCOME**

Chair Davis called the meeting to order and opened the roundtable discussion with the introduction of Gordon Thomas, Director, Yakima Nation Transportation Office.

Gordon Thomas, Director, Transportation Office, welcomed the Commission to the Yakima Valley and Yakama Nation. He invited Don Whitehouse, Region Administrator, South Central Region, WSDOT, to provide an overview of the Yakima area.

Mr. Thomas introduced Virgil Lewis, Vice Chair, Yakama Nation Tribal Council. Mr. Lewis welcomed the Commission to Yakima.

Mr. Thomas shared tribal cultural history, agriculture and transportation issues with the Commisison.

**OPENING REMARKS**

Paul George, Mayor, City of Yakima, welcomed the Commission to Yakima. He recognized local officials in attendance. The Yakima valley has growing transportation needs due to economic development and the current infrastructure. Of particular interest is the Washington Transportation Plan. He stated that cities need state funding to connect streets and arterials to the state highway system. He shared that the transit system is supported by local taxes, has new buses, and routes have been extended.

**DISCUSSION OF TRIBAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES**

Mr. Thomas shared agricultural and geographic information of the Yakama Nation. He explained challenges that the tribe faces as a result of the quality of roads on the reservation. There is a small budget available for road maintenance that does not meet the cost challenges for maintenance or improvements. The majority of road funding for the reservation comes from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Current roads are not asphalt and require substantial maintenance. He shared that the tribe is starting a new enterprise called Yakama Power. It would like to purchase power from the Bonneville Power Administration for sale to the tribe at a lesser rate. This project will require funding in order to prepare for the installation of

roads and power lines. He shared the tribe's concerns regarding the safety of SR 97.

Troy Suing, Planning Engineer, WSDOT, South Central Region, stated that the purpose of the SR 97 project is to replace an aging bridge and improve safety by straightening the road in this area. The Yakama Nation will be working in partnership with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Washington State Department of Transportation.

### **WSDOT'S WORK AHEAD ON KEY ISSUES**

Charlie Howard, Director, Strategic Planning and Programming, WSDOT, explained that demands on Washington's transportation system have increased as growth continues. He explained that as population and employment continue to grow, vehicle miles traveled, ferry ridership, and transit ridership will continue to grow. Over the next decade the Department's capital funding is declining even with the last funding package. Regional Transportation Investment District funding, if passed, could increase funding, in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties. Property Tax Initiative 864 if passed, could result in a statewide reduction in funding. The transportation system is aging and deteriorating, bridges are getting older, and the ferry system assets are getting older. Counties and cities cannot meet funding needs. Most rural counties do not have an adequate tax base to fund general government needs, let alone local transportation improvements. Recent statewide initiatives have repealed local transportation funding tools.

### **TRANS-ACTION EFFORTS**

Don Whitehouse, Regional Administrator, South Central Region, WSDOT, and Germanine Beveridge, Senior Transportation Planner, Yakima Valley Council of Governments, provided an overview of regional transportation needs. TRANS-action is a group of local business leaders, elected officials, local jurisdictions, and other community members. Trans-actions's common goal is to encourage economic vitality with transportation improvements.

Germaine Beveridge, Senior Transportation Planner, Yakima Valley Conference of Governments, outlined some of the TRANS-action group activities. She explained that TRANS-action has focused on developing the upper Yakima area transportation infrastructure to meet long-range needs and encourage economic vitality.

Aubrey Reeves, Mayor, City of Yakima, commented on the three most important projects in the area. Federal funding efforts have been very successful. He shared that the TRANS-action group works together as one voice.

Trent Marquis, Wide Hollow Development, shared that municipalities have combined their efforts as a result of WSDOT's leadership.

## **YAKIMA LOWER VALLEY COMMUNITY NEEDS**

Al Hubert, Chair, Yakima Valley Conference of Governments (YVCOG), explained some of the challenges of the YVCOG. He provided an overview of lower valley transportation needs.

## **YAKIMA FREIGHT NEEDS**

Barb Ivanov, Director, Freight Strategy and Policy Office, WSDOT, provided an overview of the components of Washington's freight system as an international gateway serving Washington's producers and manufacturers. The transportation issues that impact freight movement are bottlenecks, border delays, and State Route connections to I-5. There are also safety risks and capacity issues.

Pat MacDonald, Pacific Marketing International, commented on some critical transportation issues that effect freight movement. There is a shortage of trucks, and truckers will generally look for the easiest way to get in and out of Washington. Bottlenecks critically impact freight movement. There are also safety issues that need to be addressed.

Mike Nickoloff, Borton and Sons, Inc., explained that producers are having problems with product delivery as a result of transportation issues in the state. Products need to be moved in a timely manner.

Ron Jackson, General Manager, Pacific Northwest Division, Burlington Northern-Santa Fe (BNSF), highlighted positive activities of BNSF. BNSF has experienced dramatic growth in the last several years. BNSF is helping economic challenges in the community by hiring new personnel.

Ron Gamache, Yakima County Commission, commented that Yakima County owns its own rail line. The County is working to ensure that short line railroads remain in operation.

## **YAKIMA TRANSIT ISSUES**

Neil McClure, Assistant Mayor, City of Yakima, explained that the transit system is a very valuable asset to the community. He provided an overview of services that the transit system provides to the community.

Marilyn Mason-Plunkett, Executive Director, People for People, shared some of the activities of the People for People group. The group participates in work force development, Medicaid interpretation, and providing special needs and general transportation services. She explained the county's diversity, and how some of the transportation needs are based on this diversity.

## **HABITAT PROTECTION AND CONNECTION ISSUES FOR TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS**

Paul Wagner, Biology Branch Manager, Environmental Services Office, WSDOT, briefed the Commission regarding protections and connections of high quality habitats. He explained that natural habitats have been altered by many human land use activities. Roadways affect wildlife movement and present problems for wildlife health and maintenance of biodiversity. The Department presented a draft policy on habitat connectivity to the Commission. The policy states that WSDOT in partnership with other agencies, organizations and the public, must assure that road and highway programs recognize the importance of protecting the ecosystems. The policy encourages WSDOT and other agencies to develop statewide habitat connectivity plan to better integrate overall habitat management with transportation systems.

David Atcheson, The Cascade Conservation Partnership, and Charlie Raines, The Sierra Club, stated that they are before the Commission today as members of the I-90 Wildlife Bridges Coalition. The group has been formed within the last year to address wildlife connectivity issues on the I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East project. They are encouraged to see that WSDOT is formulating a draft policy that incorporates key issues. Mr. Atcheson thanked WSDOT for its forward thinking.

Mr. Raines commented that there are projects in other states that can be emulated. He shared information on wildlife connectivity project funding.

Secretary MacDonald, WSDOT, commented regarding the Department's participation in mitigating environmental impacts and wildlife connectivity on projects.

## **I-90 PROJECT UPDATE AND DISCUSSION**

Mr. Whitehouse briefed the Commission regarding the significance of the I-90 Snoqualmie Pass project. The project team is evaluating the corridor in order to address the worst problems between the summit at Snoqualmie Pass (Hyak) and the town of Easton. Proposed improvements within the 15-mile section will widen I-90 to a six-lane highway, reduce avalanche closures and rockfall hazards, replace deteriorated pavement, upgrade alignment, lengthen truck-climbing lanes, and provide ecological connectivity.

Randy Giles, Project Manager, South Central Region, explained the proposed design alternatives and environmental impacts.

## **LOCAL WSDOT TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS**

Mr. Whitehouse provided a briefing on the SR 24 project. He explained the bottleneck issues of the Nobb Hill Interchange, and provided specifics of the project's planned improvements. He outlined improvements for the Valley Mall Interchange. He shared information regarding other improvement projects throughout the South Central Region.

## **CITY OF YAKIMA STREET FINANCE GAP ANALYSIS**

Chris Waarvick, Public works Director, City of Yakima, briefed the Commission regarding the City of Yakima's insufficient funding for street preservation needs.

The Commission meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m., on June 23, 2004.

## WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

---

DALE STEDMAN, Chair

---

DANIEL O'NEAL, Vice-Chair

---

EDWARD BARNES, Member

---

DICK FORD, Member

---

ELMIRA FORNER, Member

---

RUTH FISHER, Member

---

A. MICHÈLE MAHER, Member

---

DOUGLAS MACDONALD, Ex-Officio Member  
Secretary of Transportation

ATTEST:

---

JENNIFER ZIEGLER, Administrator

---

DATE OF APPROVAL